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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 005844

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STATE FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, INR/EAP, INR/B

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/15/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: FORMER DEFENSE SECRETARY DECLARES HIMSELF
"PRESIDENT" -- AND IS DETAINED

REF: A. MANILA 5166

[B](#). MANILA 5023

[C](#). MANILA 2172

[D](#). MANILA 1988

Classified By: Acting Pol/C Joseph L. Novak for Reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Inveterate plotter and former defense secretary Fortunado Abat declared himself "President" of a

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"Revolutionary Transition Government" at a December 13 press conference held in Manila. In reaction, the GRP reportedly detained him on December 15. Amid the on-and-off swirl of rumors about a "coup," Malacanang is keeping a close eye on the situation. No one sees the latest developments as a serious threat, with many -- including those in the Opposition -- openly dismissive of the 80-year-old Abat. Mission, fielding some questions from the press, has underscored our strong support for democracy and the rule of law, and our opposition to any form of extra-legal or extra-constitutional measures. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) On December 13, former defense secretary and retired general Fortunado Abat announced the establishment of what he called a "Revolutionary Transition Government" and declared himself its "President." He also declared that the room in which he was making this announcement at a social club in Metro Manila was the new seat of his "government." Abat, who heads the small, anti-President Arroyo "Coalition for National Salvation," then named his "sectoral Cabinet" which consisted of: Salvador Enriquez, a former budget official under former president Fidel V. Ramos who was being put in charge of "economics"; former National Labor Relations Commission Chairman Roy Senares who was being put in charge of "security"; and Emmanuel Cruz, a businessman, who was being placed in charge of "politics." (Note: Abat was also supported by Charlie Serapio, a lawyer who has been involved in anti-Arroyo activities for some time. End Note.) Abat's December 13 appearance was his latest sighting since his public demand earlier this year that Arroyo resign amid allegations that she had inappropriate contact with a then-Commission on Elections (COMELEC) official during the May 2004 elections (ref E). (Note: Abat was defense secretary under former president Ramos from 1997-1998. He

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was Commanding General of the Army from 1976-1981. End Note.)

[1](#)3. (SBU) The Philippine National Police (PNP) reportedly detained Abat mid-day December 15. In explaining the detention, Justice Secretary Raul Gonzales said the GRP was considering filing charges of sedition against Abat and possibly some of his followers. (Note: There also were reports that Abat's son, Colonel Victor Abat, had been removed from his field command and was being investigated. End Note.) Abat's reported detention came after two days during which Malacanang at times contemptuously dismissed his effort and at other times seemed a trifle concerned. Presidential Spokesman Ignacio Bunye, for example, on December 14 dismissed Abat's declaration as "quite unfortunate and very pathetic." Taking a tougher tone, Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita announced that Malacanang was looking into Abat's "financial benefactors" to determine the extent of any "conspiracy."

[1](#)4. (SBU) The news regarding Abat came in the wake of several days of on-and-off coup rumors which picked up some coverage in the press. It is believed that these rumors began as telephone text messages that spread quickly throughout the country. Although the source(s) of the rumors remains unclear, supporters of Abat are likely suspects. A Reuters news story reported that military officers had allegedly been detained for plotting to take over military bases in Manila, but that story turned out to be inaccurate. In any event, there were no untoward or unexpected troop movements and no breakdown was reported in the military's command and control structure.

[1](#)5. (U) In a seemingly unrelated incident that sparked some concern, a junior officer facing trial for the unsuccessful

July 2003 "Oakwood" mutiny of several hundred troops in the central business district of Makati escaped custody on December 14. Marine Captain Nicanor Faeldon, who was being taken to a court hearing, eluded security officers accompanying him after he sought permission to buy mangoes from a nearby fruit stand. Faeldon later in the day released a recorded message to the press denouncing Arroyo and her government.

16. (C) Comment: Abat is not taken seriously. He has virtually no supporters and mainstream members of the Opposition quickly distanced themselves from his announcement. Ramos, who was out of the country, publicly ridiculed the effort despite his past links with Abat and some of Abat's supporters when he was president. Abat seems to have stepped too far for Malacanang in the sheer brazenness of his claims, however. Mission, fielding some questions from the press, has underscored our strong support for democracy and the rule of law, and our opposition to any form of extra-legal or extra-constitutional measures.

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